



MUMBAI

American Center ★★★★ Bulletin

NOVEMBER

2008

UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY BY NICK PARIKH

November 20 marks the day on which the UN General Assembly adopted the "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" in 1959, and the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" in 1989. Both charters are a series of rights proclaimed for children. Why the focus on children's rights? Children are uniquely vulnerable to abuse and ill-treatment because of their physical, emotional, and intellectual immaturity. They have difficulty in realizing and expressing their concerns. Their opinions are seldom taken into account and they can only rarely form their own organizations to work for change.

At present, the most pressing human rights abuses against children include: the use of children as soldiers; the worst forms of child labor; police violence against street children; conditions in correctional institutions and orphanages; corporal punishment in schools; mistreatment of refugee and migrant children; trafficking of children for labor and prostitution; discrimination in education because of race, gender, sexual orientation, or HIV/AIDS; and physical and sexual violence against girls and boys.

The UN General Assembly recommended that all nations should observe a Universal Children's Day as a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children, and of activity promoting the welfare of the world's children. Many countries have adopted November 20 as the day to observe their Universal Children's Day.

In 2000, world leaders outlined Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015. Though the Goals are for all humankind, they are primarily about children. UNICEF notes that six of the eight goals relate directly to children and meeting the last two will also make critical improvements in their lives.

In India, November 14 marks the birth anniversary of India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. This day also doubles as Universal Children's Day in India dedicated to Prime Minister Nehru's tireless efforts for children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The U.S. celebrates "National Child's Day" on the first Sunday in June every year.

Although the U.S. at times comes in for criticism surrounding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), it is misleading to use the Convention as a litmus test to measure a nation's commitment to children.

The Convention includes both civil and political rights, for example, the right of expression, assembly and due process, as well as economic and social rights, such as the right to education, healthcare and an adequate standard of living. Traditionally, the federal government in the United States recognizes and protects civil and political rights. Some economic, social and cultural rights are under the purview of the states. For example, individual states are responsible for education, and for setting laws related to the administration of juvenile justice. A federalist structure makes it difficult for the U.S. to adopt the comprehensive set of rights outlined in the CRC.

The Child Soldiers Accountability Act

Children are currently used in armed conflicts in at least 17 countries. Countries and territories in which children are known to have been used in hostilities between 2004 and 2007 include: Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, and Uganda. Between 2001 and 2004, child soldiers were also used in Angola, Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Iran, and Yemen.

In India, Human Rights Watch has reported that, "All parties to the Chhattisgarh conflict have used children in armed operations. The Naxalites, a Maoist armed group, admit that it is their official practice to recruit children above age 16 in their forces, and have used children as young as 12 in armed operations."

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(Monday through Friday)

HOLIDAYS

November 11: Veterans Day
November 27: Thanksgiving Day

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Greetings from the American Center! As the newest member of the American Center staff, I am thrilled to be in Mumbai, and have been warmly welcomed by many new friends and colleagues since my arrival in mid-September. So far, my first weeks in India have been fast-paced and full of excitement. I am in awe of the sheer size and pace of the city and of Mumbaiers. And yet, for such a huge metropolis, there is a sense of community, and I enjoy watching the neighborhood children running and playing in the street when I am at home.

Before coming to Mumbai, I served two years in the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. There, I managed cultural programs, including bringing U.S. speakers, as well as performing and visual arts programs to Indonesia. Prior to that, I spent a number of years in Washington, D.C., administering professional and student exchange programs. I am a strong believer in international exchanges and cultural programs as a successful means of further enhancing mutual understanding across cultures.

In Mumbai, I hope to continue the proud traditions of the American Center and the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Consulate General in working with partners, hosts, alumni, and others in carrying out cultural and exchange programs, from music and film festivals, to presentations on issues ranging from energy, to economy and business, and everything in-between. With the U.S. election nearly upon us, we are reminded of the U.S. and India's shared traditions of participatory democracy, and I look forward to hearing more about shared areas of interest from our program audiences, participants, and library members.

Outside of the office, my interests include travel and food (more eating than cooking!), and I look forward to sampling much of both in India. I was raised just outside of Boston, where I played soccer (football) for many years. During the course of completing my undergraduate studies in Anthropology at Brown University, I completed a semester abroad program that ignited my interest in living and working overseas. I received my Master's degree in Intercultural and International Management, and made my way to Washington, where I joined the State Department in 2002. I would like to thank everyone whom I've met thus far for the warm welcome to India, and I am eager to get to know our friends, colleagues, partners, and alumni in Mumbai and western India.

Robyn Remeika
Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer

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Under a new law, The Child Soldiers Accountability Act, signed by President Bush on October 3, 2008, it is a federal crime to knowingly recruit or use soldiers under the age of 15. The legislation was introduced by Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois and adopted unanimously by both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate in September 2008. The law permits the United States to prosecute any individual on U.S. soil for the offense, even if the children were recruited or served as soldiers outside the United States. The law imposes penalties of up to 20 years or life in prison for actions resulting in a child's death. It also allows the United States to deport or deny entry to individuals who have knowingly recruited children as soldiers. According to Jo Becker,

children's rights advocate for Human Rights Watch, "Military commanders who use children can no longer come to the United States without the risk of ending up in jail."

Challenges for Children in the U.S.

In the U.S., many challenges remain in nurturing our most precious resource, our children. We must improve the safety of schools and neighborhoods. Too many youngsters suffer abuse, neglect, poverty and addiction.

Corporal punishment in schools remains legal in 21 U.S. states and is used frequently in 13. According to some human rights groups, more than 200,000 children were spanked or paddled in U.S. schools during the past school year. Corporal punishment teaches students that violence is legitimate. There is also no evidence that it promotes better learning. There is some evidence to suggest that minority students are beaten at disproportionate rates. Some students in minority communities already face obstacles to academic success – from a lack of resources to low expectations. When these students are beaten at disproportionate rates, their right to nondiscrimination in education is violated. The fabric of the school community is weakened, creating a hostile environment in which minority students struggle to succeed.

In a proclamation on National Child's Day, President Bush said very simply, "By reading to youngsters, listening to their cares and concerns, and providing them with safe and loving homes, we can make a positive and lasting contribution to their health, happiness and well-being."

Our children, who are filled with hope, will someday serve as leaders in government, industry, education, and the arts. For the good of the entire world and its continued progress and advancement, we must strive to give all young human beings the best possible start in life.

Links to UN and UN System Sites

UNICEF

Focus Areas

<http://www.unicef.org/whatwedo/index.html>

Millennium Development Goals

<http://www.unicef.org/mdg/>

Voices of Youth

<http://www.unicef.org/voy/index.php>

Say Yes for Children

http://www.unicef.org/say_yes/

Innocenti Research Centre

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/>

United Nations

Global Issues – Children

<http://www.un.org/issues/m-child.html>

CyberSchoolBus

<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.shtml>

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Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/home6.html>

International Labour Organization

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

<http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/lang--en/index.htm>

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

A Child's World

<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/3b8373992.html>

UNESCO

Education – Early Childhood and Family

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2573&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Education – Primary Education

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=30859&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Programme for the Education of Children in Difficult Circumstances

http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/street_child/english/index.html

World Health Organization

Child Health

http://www.who.int/topics/child_health/en/index.html

World Bank

Other Child Protection Initiatives at the World Bank

http://www1.worldbank.org/sp/childlabor/cpi_other_inits.asp

Additional Resources

Amnesty International – Children and Human Rights – Child Soldiers

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/children>

Child Labor Coalition

<http://stopchildlabor.org/index.html>

Child Rights Information Network

<http://www.crin.org/>

Children Now

<http://www.crin.org/>

Defence for Children International

http://www.child-abuse.com/childhouse/childrens_rights/dci_home.html

Global Children's Organization

<http://www.globalchild.org/>

Headliners

<http://www.headliners.org/>

Human Rights Watch – Children's Rights

<http://hrw.org/doc/?t=children>

International Save the Children Alliance

<http://www.savethechildren.net/alliance/index.html>

NetAid

<http://www.netaid.org/>

NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

A Select Webliography on Universal Children's Day and USG Initiatives for Children

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service/soc/communicate/initiative/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway – Children's Bureau
Demonstration Initiative

<http://www.childrennow.org/>

Children Now – Making Children the Top Priority

<http://www.clark.wa.gov/cmhi/index.html>

Clark County Washington – Children's Mental Health Initiative

<http://govdocs.evergreen.edu/hottopics/nclb/>

Evergreen Government Documents and Maps Hot Topics – No Child
Left Behind Act of 2002

<http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/privacyinitiatives/childrens.html>

Federal Trade Commission – Privacy Initiatives – Children's Privacy

<http://www.mncourts.gov/?page=148>

Minnesota Judicial Branch – Children's Justice Initiative

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>

Public Law 107-110 – No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

<http://www.teachforamerica.org/>

Teach for America

<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/>

United States Department of Agriculture – Food and Nutrition
Service – Team Nutrition

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/index/az/index.html>

U.S. Department of Education – No Child Left Behind

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration
for Children and Families

<http://www.insurekidsnow.gov/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Insure Kids Now

<http://www.projectsafecchildhood.gov/>

U.S. Department of Justice – Project Safe Childhood

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04909.pdf>

United States Government Accountability Office – No Child
Left Behind Act

http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/children_day/

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library Marks Universal Children's Day

<http://universalchildrensday.org/>

Universal Children's Day

Note: Internet sites included in this listing, other than those of the U.S. Government, should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

Nick Parikh works at the American Consulate General, Mumbai

MUMBAI MONDAYS

A discussion on
The Health Effects of Air Pollution and U.S. Regulations
led by **Jenny Parikh**

Monday, November 17
American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.

Jenny Parikh started her career in a technical research position at Beckmann Instruments, after completing her Master's degree in High Energy Particle Physics and Electronics. She has taught physics, mathematics, and environmental sciences at the undergraduate level at various universities in the U.S. She joined the Washington State Department of Ecology after completing her Ph.D. in Environmental Engineering at UCLA. Her doctoral work focused on "Improving Risk Assessments for HAPs (Hazardous Air Pollutants) in the South Coast Air Basin" in California. She has worked on permitting state-of-the-art bioreactor landfills, developed real-time air quality models, and authored several public health policy procedures.

The discussion will include an overview of air pollution, including global, regional and local air pollution issues; history of air pollution disasters; human respiratory system; CAA (Clean Air Act); criteria pollutants; NAAQS (National Ambient Air Quality Standards); hazardous pollutants such as mercury and dioxin, and AQI (Air Quality Index) for public health protection.

FILMS THIS MONTH

Friday, November 14

Dangerous Minds (1995, color, 99 mins)

Friday, November 21

Empire of the Sun (1987, color, 152 mins)

American Center Auditorium

3:30 and 6:30 p.m.



A compelling true story starring Michelle Pfeiffer as Louanne Johnson, a hard-nosed ex-Marine who takes a job teaching English to smart but underachieving kids in an inner-city school. Pfeiffer draws on her background to educate the kids on topics ranging from martial arts to the poetry of Dylan Thomas while battling gang members and a strict principal. George Dzundza costars.

Epic "coming of age" war drama from director Steven Spielberg follows a young British boy's harrowing experiences in 1940s Shanghai. Separated from his family during the Japanese invasion and thrown into a prison camp, the boy develops a friendship with a captured American. Christian Bale, John Malkovich and Miranda Richardson star.



U.S. ELECTIONS 2008

Presidential Candidates on Education

John McCain

McCain says he will provide more funding to recruit better teachers and pay bonuses to teachers who agree to work in troubled schools. He also wants more federal funds to support development of on-line courses. He believes that students should have the option of switching public schools in order to receive the best education and that "all federal financial support must be predicated on providing parents the ability to move their children, and the dollars associated with them, from failing schools."

Barack Obama

Obama says, if elected, he would improve funding for the No Child Left Behind program. He also says he would "make math and science education a national priority" and increase recruitment of teachers in these subjects. In order to better recruit teachers, Obama proposes providing four-year scholarships to those in college who will teach for at least four years after graduation. He pledges to implement a \$4000 tax credit for those attending college.

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Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.
